DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 235 CS 505 681

AUTHOR Barge, J. Kevin; And Others
TITLE An Analysis of Effective and Ineffective Leader Conversation.
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (36th, Chicago, IL, May 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Employer Employee Relationship; *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; Leadership Styles; Organizational Climate; *Organizational Communication; Speech Communication; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Communicator Style; Conversation; Conversational Management; *Leadership Effectiveness; *Symbolic Action

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the conversational forms leaders employ, exploring the relationship between leaders' conversations and symbolic outcomes. It was hypothesized (1) that effective conversations by leaders would be characterized by coordinated management episodes, positive spirals, perfunctory rituals, and value expressive rituals, whereas ineffective conversations by leaders would be characterized by enigmatic episodes and unwanted repetitive patterns; and (2) that effective conversations by leaders would increase follower's identification, be perceived as desirable and coherent, and decrease the need for legitimation, while ineffective conversations would not. Subjects, 66 workers in two large midwestern hospitals, selected two coworkers or supervisors for their leadership abilities and were asked to reconstruct naturally occurring conversations with these individuals. Subjects then completed three questionnaires based on transcripts of these conversations. Results supported both hypotheses. Findings suggest that effective conversations by leaders were viewed as positively valenced, coherent, and as facilitating the accomplishment of work-related and personal goals. Findings also suggest that effective conversations produced higher levels of identification and decreased organizational members' need for legitimation processes. (Tables of data, notes, and extensive references are appended.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED285235

An Analysis of Effective and Ineffective Leader Conversation

J. Kevin Barge
Dept. of Communication Studies
Baylor University
143 Castellaw
Waco, TX 77698
(817) 775-1621

Cal W. Downs
Kenneth M. Johnson
Dept. of Communication Studies
University of Kansas
3090 Wescoe Hall
Lawrence, KS 66045
(913) 864-3633

Running head: LEADER CONVERSATION

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Kevin Barge

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS505681

An Analysis of Effective and Ineffective Leader Conversation

Abstract

Current trends in leadership study recognize the importance of symbol use in the everyday talk of leaders. An examination of the conversational forms constituting effective and ineffective talk by leaders revealed two findings. (1) Effective conversations by leaders were viewed as positively valenced, coherent, and as facilitating the accomplishment of work-related and personal goals. (2) Effective conversations produced higher levels of identification and decreased organizational members' need for legitimation processes. These findings suggest several research areas regarding the relationship between leadership and communication competence.

Both organizational communication research and management studies have recently emphasized the interrelated nature of organization, communication, and meaning (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982). An interpretive approach to organizational communication aims to "explicate and, in some cases...critique the subjective and consensual meanings that constitute social reality" (Putnam, 1983, p. 32) revealed by the organization's metaphors (Conrad, 1983), stories (Brown, 1985), and rites and rituals (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1982; Trujillo, 1985). According to Pfeffer (1981), symbolic activity establishes shared meanings or an organizational paradigm that members use to interpret and sequence organizational activities. He urges management researchers not only to be concerned with rational processes such as group decision-making, goal-setting techniques, or information management systems but with symbolic processes as well. To do this, scholars must examine "the creation of meaning and interpretation" within organizations and recognize that "language, symbols, settings, stories, ceremonies, and information social influence...are as much the tools of managers as are economic analysis, finite mathematics, and theories of leadership and organizational design" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 46).

While a variety of studies have examined the contents of managerial symbol-use (Trujillo, 1985), few studies have examined the conversational structure of managerial talk. Yet, conversational form is one vehicle through which the symbolic activity of leaders can be explicated. First, this essay summarizes the purpose of leadership as symbolic activity and examines its implications for defining effective leadership. Second, it explains a method for examining the conversational forms leaders employ and applies the method

to a field setting. Third, the data gathered from the field study and its implications for further research on leader communication are discussed.

Leadership as Symbolic Action

Leadership and management scholars have raised important issues in heated debates over conceptual and methodological issues during the last two decades.[1] Are leadership and management synonymous? What constitutes effective leadership? What types of skills are required by leaders? The recognition that leadership is a symbolic activity produces a new set of answers to these familiar questions.

Management and Leadership

Leadership theory has been criticized for lacking consensus on its defining characteristics. For example, leadership has been variously defined as a behavior that makes a difference in the actions of others (Scott, 1977), the management of reinforcement contingencies (Sims, 1977), social influence (Kochan et al., 1975), and as a perception that attributes organizational outcomes to people versus contextual factors (Pfeffer, 1977). Furthermore, while some assert management is based upon the formal organizational hierarchy whereas leadership is premised upon the leader's and follower's interpersonal relationship (Jacobs, 1971; Bass, 1981), others equate management with leadership (Fiedler, 1967).

One potential solution to this conceptual confusion is Bass' (1985) synthesis of management and leadership. According to Bass (1985), leading followers involves goal-setting, providing guidance, motivation, and structuring relations with employees. Such a definition is sufficiently broad to encompass social influence and attribution processes, but is also narrow enough to distinguish it from other areas such as decision-making or

motivation theory. However, how these functions are accomplished distinguish between what has traditionally been labelled leadership and management.

Bass (1985) contends that two types of leaders exist. First, transactional leaders or managers motivate followers by exchanging rewards for services rendered. As a result, transactional leaders are typically individuals who occupy formal managerial positions since they must heavily depend upon their formalized position within the organization to provide rewards and punishments to motivate followers. Second, transformational leaders rely on their ability to "create and communicate a compelling vision of what is desired and...energize and transform subordinates into commitment to make a stronger effort" (Bennis, 1983, p. 65). This vision is created by raising the "consciousness about higher considerations through articulation and role modeling" (Bass, 1985, p. 16). Transformational leaders do not depend upon their ability to manipulate rewards and punishments; rather, they set the example for their followers and use their rhetorical skills to establish a common vision.

This perspective towards leadership implies that anyone within an organization whether or not they are associated with the formal managerial hierarchy can be a leader provided they perform the specified functions on a regular basis. The focus of leadership research then shifts from distinguishing between leaders and managers to identifying the strategies that different types of leaders use. As Bass (1985) notes, transactional leaders employ strategies that are directly tied to a social exchange perspective whereas transformational leaders rely heavily upon their rhetorical skills.

Leadership and Symbolic Action

Bass' (1985) notion of transformational leadership emphasizes the necessity for leaders to possess sufficient language and rhetorical skills to

create compelling visions for their followers. Leadership then shifts from simply giving directions, rewards, or punishments to providing "explanations, rationalizations, and legitimation for the activities undertaken in the organization" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 4). Leadership then becomes a symbolic activity designed to make organizational life meaningful and sensible to its members and to forge consensus on the meaning of these activities.

This shift to symbolicity requires a reorientation to the study, training, and evaluation of leadership. First, leadership studies should examine the underlying meaning for the particular behavioral styles and messages that leaders select and use. Using a linguistic metaphor, Pondy (1978) laments the fact that current research neglects the meaning of leadership:

> "Suppose we think of leadership as a language. To practice, say democratic leadership is to understand the set of meanings (values?) to be conveyed, to give them primitive expression, to translate them into stylistic representations, and ultimately to choose sounds and actions that manifest them. My worry is that this overarching process has been truncated, and that we have reduced the grammar of leadership to its phonetics. The syntactics and especially the semantics of leadership have been lost sight of" (p. 89).

As a result, we have focused exclusively upon the surface structure of leadership style but have neglected its deep structure or meaning (Pondy, 1978, p. 89).

A second implication, is that this new emphasis on symbols and meanings requires a different set of skills than traditional views of leadership. Traditional leadership theories have emphasized the mastering of leadership styles (Blake & Mouton, 1982), decision-making styles (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), or schedules of reinforcement (Sims, 1977). However, such skills have been based upon the assumption that leadership is an objective and rational process. By viewing leadership as a symbolic activity, the needed skills to

perform a leadership role change: "the skills required are political, dramaturgical, and language skills more than analytical or strictly quantitative skills" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 44).

Third, incorporating meaning and symbolic activity into definitions of leadership possesses implications for defining leadership effectiveness. According to Pfeffer (1981), two types of outcomes emerge from organizational processes. Substantive outcomes refer to measurable results such as "salary allocations, capital or budget allocations, the allocation of chief executive positions" (p. 8). Symbolic outcomes are "assessed by sentiments of affect, by satisfaction, by values and beliefs" (p. 8).

Traditional leadership perspectives have typically indexed effectiveness by some type of substantive outcome. However, if leadership is viewed symbolically, one should examine its influence upon symbolic outcomes as well as substantive ones. It is this recognition that led Pfeffer (1981) to modify his belief that leadership does not make a difference on organizational outcomes (Pfeffer, 1977) to the belief that leadership influences symbolic outcomes. Pfeffer (1981) explains:

> "[T]he argument that leadership does not matter (Pfeffer, 1977a) was based on considering leadership effects on profits, sales, profit margins, capital budgets and other allocations, and budget expenditures in cities (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977a). These are all tangible, real outcomes of organizational activities. A very different answer on the effect of leadership might be derived if one examined the consequences of managerial activity for the sentiments, beliefs, attitudes, or commitment of the organizational participants" (p. 5).

Therefore, a variety of symbolic outcomes such as organizational identification, group cohesion, commitment, coherency, the valence of the organizational climate, and the need for legitimation of organizational practices become salient outcomes. As Pondy (1978) elaborates, new insights arise "if we say that the effectiveness of a leader lies in his ability to

make activity meaningful for those in his role set—not to change behavior but to give others a sense of understanding what they are doing" (p. 94).

Leadership and Conversation

Leaders may interact with their followers using a variety of symbolic forms: written memos, meetings, formal presentations, or ordinary conversations. However, research has demonstrated that organizational leaders spend most of their time in brief informal interactions or conversations (Mintzberg, 1973; Burns, 1954). While the significance of everyday talk cannot be denied, little research has documented the conversational structure of leader-follower dialogue and its symbolic significance for the participants.

Some research studies have examined the content of message strategies and conversations that leaders employ. For example, studies have explored how leaders select power strategies to influence others (Mowday, 1978) or choose particular self-presentational strategies to manage the attributions made by others (Salancik & Meindl, 1984; Bettmann & Weitz, 1983). Yet, these researchers have neglected the systemic nature of leader-follower interaction as manifested during conversation. On the other hand, Trujillo (1985) recognizes that conversation is a conjoint activity engaged in by both participants and has documented some of the political, sociability, and management rituals that occur within organizations. While these differing rituals are examined in depth, their internal underlying structure is neglected. For example, the topical contents of political and management rituals are intuitively different; however, it is not obvious whether the internal structuring of these episodes differs.

The surface structure of leader-follower conversations has been examined using Markov analysis. Watson (1982), for example, mapped out the relational

control patterns of interaction between leaders and followers in an experimental simulation using college students. However, while stochastic and Markovian analyses tap the sequential patterning of messages, they do not sufficiently capture the symbolic meaning of action. Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) observe: "[E]pisodes have an encompassing form without which symbolic acts would be meaningless. It is...the total episodic structure...which determine...communicative significance" (p. 133). Such analyses reduce the meaning of an episode to its continguous pairs of messages, interacts, or double-interacts, and as a result, may distort the meaning of the episode the actors carry with them. For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982) discuss the importance of "howdy" rituals within organizations. Such rituals reinforce the bonds among people, signal appropriate rules for public address, and in turn facilitate an individual's understanding of the culture. Yet, it is likely that if we subjected such rituals to a Markovian analysis of relational control patterns, we would find that one-up messages are typically followed by one-up messages. Such an analysis would miss the underlying significance and meaning of the ritual for the participants. It would be able to measure the surface structure of the acts but not their deep structure. Therefore, if leadership is to be viewed as a symbolic activity, it is necessary to obtain subject's perceptions of how they structure their conversations.

Leaders and Followers as Rule-Using Systems

The systemic nature of leader-follower relationships has long been recognized (Hollander & Julian, 1969). In fact, Graen and Cashman (1975) contend that leaders and followers engage in a mutual role making process where they negotiate (a) how each will behave in certain situations and (b) general relationship norms. This developmental process may establish unique social practices for leading and following within a particular dyad. As

Giddens (1979) points out, such social practices "are brought into being in the context of overlapping and connected sets of rules" (p. 65) which simultaneously enable and constrain the overt social behaviors of leaders and followers. Understanding the social behavior of individuals, therefore, requires an analysis of the underlying deep structure of rules which promote certain conversational messages and patterns. Cronen, Pearce, and Snavely (1979) proposed a special theory of conversational structures or episode types based upon the deep structures of meanings social actors employ during interaction. This special theory is informed by Pearce and Cronen's (1980) Coordinated Management of Meaning theory (CMM) and its reliance upon regulative rules.

CMM views individuals as variably complex information processors who employ rules to interpret the ongoing interaction and to structure their subsequent messages. Two types of rules organize the individual's systems for meaning and action. Constitutive rules "specify how meanings at one level of abstraction may count as meaningful at another level of abstraction" (Cronen et al., 1982, pp. 73-74). They provide a heuristic six-tiered model of social contexts known as the hierarchy of meaning that individuals may employ in interpreting social phenomena: (1) cultural patterns, (2) life scripts, (3) relationship, (4) episodes, (5) speech acts, and (6) contents.[2] Regulative rules take meanings attributed to behaviors and transmute them into action. They specify "that in the context of certain forms of social action, if given antecedent conditions obtain, then there exists some degree of force for or against the performance of subsequent actions" (Cronen et al; 1982, p. 74). The force behind the act may influence individuals into viewing their performance of particular acts as either permitted, obligated, prohibited, or undetermined.

When individuals converse, their personal rules systems for meaning and action interlink generating a logical force which forms an interpersonal system. The logical force of the interpersonal system is reflected by two types of forces which generate action via interlinking regulative rules. Prefigurative logical forces indicate the degree to which individuals feel they should perform a certain speech act because of strong antecedent conditions. The antecedent conditions include not only preceding actions performed by others but also the impact of the person's different levels of the hierarchy of meaning upon action (e.g. previous conversational episodes, prior definitions of the relationship etc.). Practical logical forces indicate the degree to which an individual performs a speech act in order to achieve a desired consequent condition. Pearce and Cronen (1980) suggest that the two types of forces may be distinguished by the type of account persons give when explaining their actions. Prefigurative forces are best illustrated by individuals explaining their actions as "I did that because of..." whereas practical forces are best reflected in the statement "I did that in order to..." (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 164).

The concept of the regulative rule permits researchers to examine the rule-using nature of dyads. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between the underlying rule structure and overt conversational patterns. Using the regulative rule model, Cronen et al. (1979) contend that differing juxtapositions of individual's intrapersonal rules systems create varying types of logical forces. These logical forces are in turn not only associated with but obligate precise patterns of speech acts or conversational forms. Their typology identified seven recurrent conversational forms:

> (1) Unwanted repetitive patterns are characterized by strong logical forces which force the individuals into unwanted conflicts. For example, two managers know that they will engage

in a verbal fight provided they are in the same proximity. Even with this knowledge they cannot avoid the conflict.

(2) Enigmatic episodes are characterized by individuals knowing that some pattern is in place without knowing how to interpret it or how to sequence their messages (Harre & Secord, 1973). For example, new employees within an organization may not recognize the organizational pattern guiding joking episodes with leaders.

(3) Positive spirals are sequences of acts in which each message by one actor produces a more extreme and desirable response by the other (Wilmot, 1975). A positive spiral may occur at the successful completion of an important work project when leaders and followers praise each other with each trying to exceed the previous compliment given by the other.

(4) Alienating sequences occur when individuals recognize what is transpiring and being able to fully participate. They are likely to feel their acts contradict their self-concept (Riesman, 1950). Alienating sequences may occur when followers perceive themselves as typically desiring to accommodate and acquiesce to a leader's views, yet must vigorously argue and defend themselves during the course of reprimand to protect their position.

(5) Perfunctory rituals are episodes "in which the rules that govern the sequence of events leave little or no latitude for strategic variation, and the episode as a whole has little intrinsic meaning to the person" (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 255). They include such phenomena as a leader routinely "checking in" with followers by "keep up the good work" type comments.

(6) Value expressive rituals are similar to religious ceremonies in that they are fully scripted for the participating individuals with their performance being highly meaningful and significant (Campbell, 1959). For example, if an individual outside the organization has accused an organizational department of wrongful behavior, leaders and followers may engage in conversation that reaffirms the sanctity and validity of the organization and its accompanying procedures. Similar to a religious service, both parties know how to participate in the conversation which serves the purpose of reaffirming the relative goodness of the organization.

(7) Coordinated conversation occurs when participants are able to recognize the developing conversational pattern and sequence their actions to achieve desirable goals. The individual feels that the emerging form of the conversation can be affected by each message (Pearce & Branham, 1978). Coordinated conversations may occur when leaders initiate order-giving episodes or attempt to explain policies or procedures to a follower. Such conversations may be standardized with followers knowing what types of questions to ask and how to participate within the conversation.

This particular conversational typology is useful for studying the conversational and symbolic nature of leadership for several reasons. First, this typology permits ascertaining the deep structure versus the content of the conversations leaders have with followers. Second, it examines the

underlying meaning for conversations that occur between leaders and followers. The intrapersonal rules structures for followers and leaders can be ascertained and categorized according to the symbolic function they serve. Conversations by leaders with followers can be examined in reference not only to the content and style of the conversation (surface structure) but also to the meaning the conversation had for the follower or leader (deep structure). Third, the conversational structure is obtained by using perceptual data supplied the conversational participant. Since leader-follower conversations are a symbolic activity grounded in the social reality of the organization, it is important to obtain the individual's meanings for activity that occurs within their social world.

Statement of Research Hypotheses

Since leaders spend a great amount of time in everyday talk with their followers, it is important to pay close attention to (1) the types of conversations leaders and followers create, and (2) the symbolic outcomes for particular types of conversations. This study focuses upon both.

Cronen et al. (1979) contend that the characteristics of emergent episodes or conversations are a function of the rule structures that the conversants employ. Therefore, a follower's perception of the leader's effectiveness would vary as a function of the conversational episode being performed. For example, we expect conversational forms such as coordinated management episodes versus unwanted repetitive patterns would characterize effective leader conversations since followers would view them as coherent, positively valenced, and facilitating desirable goals. Furthermore, we presume that the symbolic outcomes experienced by the follower would differ according to the episode type being performed. Pondy (1978) and Pfeffer (1981) suggest a variety of symbolic outcomes that may result from leader-

follower interaction: identification, episode desirability, coherence, and the need for legitimation. For example, we hypothesize that the outcomes of coordinated management episodes would demonstrate an increase in the follower's identification, a belief the conversation was desirable, and a decrease in the need for legitimation. This would occur because this episode type is clearly understood by followers which allow them to control the direction of the conversation to achieve desirable goals. The opposite would be true for unwanted repetitive patterns. This line of reasoning generates two research hypotheses:

H_1 Effective conversations by leaders will be characterized by coordinated management episodes, positive spirals, perfunctory rituals, and value expressive rituals whereas ineffective conversations by leaders will be characterized by enigmatic episodes and unwanted repetitive patterns.

H_2 Effective versus ineffective conversations by leaders will: (a) increase follower's identification, (b) be perceived as desirable, (c) be viewed as coherent, and (d) decrease the need for legitimation.

Method

Subjects

Subjects, drawn from two large midwestern hospitals, were selected using a proportionate stratified sampling technique with the organization's managerial levels serving as strata. In Hospital A, 34 members of a pulmonary-cardiology were selected, and in Hospital B, 32 individuals from a nursing unit were selected.

Procedures

A field descriptive method was used to reconstruct naturally occurring conversations within both hospitals. The data were collected using a two step procedure. First, during a highly structured interview, they were asked the following question based on Bass' (1985) definition of leadership:

> I would like you think about an individual who you work with that usually sets work goals for you or where you both decide what work goals you are to meet. This individual could be co-worker, a supervisor, or a friend you seek out. Further this should be an individual you feel has been very effective (ineffective) in assisting or directing you towards some goal of the work group. What is the individual's first name?

After identifying two individuals, one who was effective in providing direction and one who was not, they were asked as part of a reliability check to indicate whether they viewed these persons as leaders, formal or informal. All participants indicated that they perceived the individuals they selected as performing leadership roles. They then reconstructed a representative conversation with each person. The message contents and sequences were recorded on the interview schedules. This yielded two conversations: (1) one with a leader viewed as ineffective, and (2) one with a leader viewed as effective.

Second, each subject received packets containing the transcripts of the two conversations and were asked to complete three questionnaires. (1) They completed scalar items measuring their (a) perceived prefigurative logical forces, (b) perceived practical logical forces, and (c) perceived consequent message valence for their own utterances and a single item measuring episode valence. (2) Subjects completed a set of scales tapping impressions of symbolic outcomes for each dialogue. (3) They answered a series of demographic questions. The return rate in Hospital A and B were 81% and 58% respectively.

Operational Definition of Conversational Variables

In CMM, conversational forms are categorized by the prefigurative and practical logical forces within the participants and their perception of the valence of the episode. To obtain this information, participants completed a series of seven-point Likert-like items for every message they had uttered in

the dialogue. Seven items measured the perceived prefigurative logical forces within the subjects: (1) perceived link between antecedent condition and the

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

act, (2) perceived link between the nature of the episode and the act, (3) perceived link between the nature of the relationship and the act, (4) perceived link between the self-concept or life-script and the act, (5) perceived link between the cultural norms and the act, (6) the range of the alternative acts a subject could have uttered in response to the preceding message spoken by the other participant, and (7) perceived absence of any link between the act and a consequent condition. Perceived practical logical forces were measured using two items: (1) perceived link between the act and consequent actions, and (2) perceived valence of the subsequent response provided by the other participant to the act. Episode valence was measured by a single scale.

These scales have been used in several CMM studies to examine conversations and have a reported test-retest reliability of .68 to .79 (Cronen et al., 1979). Reliabilities are not available for the scale measuring the impact of the cultural archetype.

Operational Definitions of Symbolic Outcomes

Perceived identification, episode desirability, and coherence, were all operationalized using 7-point Likert-like scales. Reliability coefficients for the symbolic outcomes ranged between .77 and .88 (Cronbach's alpha). The

---

Insert Table 2 about here

---

need for legitimation was operationalized using two 7-point Likert-like scales with subjects completing each scale for every message uttered by the leader. The mean average was then computed across all the messages spoken by the leader. The reliability coefficient was .65 (Cronbach's alpha).

Results

Categorization of Conversational Episodes

In Hospital A, 50 conversations with leaders were elicited, 26 conversations with leaders were viewed as effective and 23 conversations with leaders were perceived as ineffective. In Hospital B, 34 conversations with leaders were recorded, 18 were perceived as effective with 16 viewed as ineffective. All episodes were coded by two raters using Cronen et al.'s (1979) conversational typology. Interrater reliability between two raters was .81 (Scott's Pi).

However, during the initial coding of the conversations for Hospital A, two conversational forms emerged within the analysis that did not conform to previously defined conversational patterns by Cronen et al. (1979). Both possessed moderate to high prefigurative forces, practical forces, and perceived range of alternative acts. While resembling coordinated management episodes, one form had a neutral message consequent valence along with a negative episode valence whereas the second form's message consequent and episode valence were both negatively weighted. Superficially, both forms appeared to be similar except for the valence of the messages provided by the other participant (neutral versus negative). This raised two possibilities for classifying the conversations: (1) they may be classified as two variations of the same general type of conversation, or (2) they represent two distinct conversational forms.

The relative appropriateness of these alternatives was determined in the following manner. First, the conversations were divided into two groups determined by their consequent valence being either neutral (conversation$_1$) or negative (conversation$_2$). Second, composite means for each group on every item measuring the perceived prefigurative forces, practical forces, range of alternative acts, consequent valence, and episode valence were computed. Third, three episodes from each group most closely paralleling the group profile generated from the composite means were selected. Fourth, Mann-Whitney U-Tests compared the items completed by the subject for each message they uttered during the episode by conversational type.

The combined analyses supported classifying these conversational types into two distinct patterns. In the first place, several structural differences existed between the two conversational patterns for prefigurative and practical forces. Conversation$_1$ has lower prefigurative forces than conversation$_2$ as indicated by lower mean scores on the: (a) antecedent act by leader ($U=0.00$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=4.50$, $\underline{M}_2=6.14$), (b) episode ($U=8.0$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=4.71$, $\underline{M}_2=5.86$), (c) relationship ($U=2.0$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=4.28$, $\underline{M}_2=5.86$), and (d) cultural archetype ($U=0.00$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=4.00$, $\underline{M}_2=6.14$). Furthermore, conversation$_1$ is lower in practical forces as measured by functional autonomy than conversation$_2$ ($U=10.0$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=4.00$, $\underline{M}_2=5.43$). Second, conversation$_1$'s message consequence valence is neutral whereas conversation$_2$ possesses a negative consequence valence ($U=2.50$, $p<0.05$, $\underline{M}_1=3.86$, $\underline{M}_2=1.71$). Third, no significant differences exist regarding episode valence between the two conversations as both are negative ($U=1.5$ $p=0.11$, $\underline{M}_1=3.33$, $\underline{M}_2=1.33$).

Based on this analysis, we propose to add two new variants of already existing episodes contained within Cronen et al.'s (1979) typology. First, a <u>variation of enigmatic episodes</u> should be included ($N=10$) which is

characterized by: (a) moderate prefigurative and practical forces, (b) a moderate to high range of alternative acts, (c) a neutral consequent message valence, and (d) a negative episode valence. Unlike the enigmatic episode proposed by Cronen et al. (1979), conversational participants have a partial understanding of the episodic structure but are unable to bring about positive responses to their messages. For example, beginning chess players are able to understand partially the moves required to neutralize and avoid a checkmate, but they do not recognize the needed pattern to checkmate their opponent. Second, a variation of an unwanted repetitive pattern is required to account for the second conversation (N=24). This variation of an unwanted repetitive pattern emphasizes: (a) high prefigurative and practical forces, (b) a moderate to high range of alternative acts, (c) a negative consequent message valence, and (d) a negative episode valence. Unlike the unwanted repetitive pattern identified by Cronen et al. (1979), this particular pattern acknowledges that individuals may recognize the form of the conversation but remain unable to bring about more desirable consequences. For example, employees may know they are subject to a disciplinary review for violating company policy and that certain topics and procedures must be discussed during the interview. Though they recognize the pattern, they may still be unable to bring about positive consequences due to the nature of the situation.

Leadership effectiveness and conversational episodes

The pattern for effective and ineffective conversations by leaders systematically differed in Hospital A ($X^2(6)=26.59$, $p<0.05$) and Hospital B ($X^2(4)=15.29$, $p<0.05$). For both hospitals, effective talk by leaders was

---

Insert Table 3 about here

---

characterized by a pattern emphasizing positively or neutrally valenced forms of conversations. For example, in Hospital A, positively valenced forms of conversation (i.e. coordinated management episodes and positive spirals) constituted a majority of the conversations listed by followers as effective (N=18); neutrally valenced forms of conversations (i.e. perfunctory rituals) comprised a small number (N=2). In Hospital B, somewhat different positively valenced forms of conversation such as coordinated management episodes and value expressive rituals (N=12) characterize effective leadership. In both hospitals, effective leadership is rarely characterized by negatively valenced forms of conversations such as the unwanted repetitive pattern variation, the enigmatic episode variation, or enigmatic episodes.

For both hospitals, ineffective leadership is characterized by negatively valenced and less coherent forms of conversation. For Hospital A, forms of conversation are viewed as ineffective leadership performance if they lead to undesirable outcomes, generate types of alienation, or produce confusion regarding the direction or purpose of the conversation (N=18). In fact, ineffective leadership is rarely characterized by conversations that perform standardized organizational practices such as perfunctory rituals (N=4) or allow followers to achieve desired goals like coordinated management episodes (N=1). Similarly, for Hospital B, ineffective leadership is mainly comprised of negatively valenced conversational types such as the unwanted repetitive pattern and enigmatic episode variations (N=12).

Conversational forms and symbolic outcomes

The second research hypothesis concerned the relationship between episodic form and symbolic outcomes. T-tests for related samples indicated that subjects in both hospitals viewed effective versus ineffective conversations with leaders as: (a) more desirable and effective, (b)

enhancing the identity of the individual with the organization and the direction the leader articulated, (c) more coherent, and (d) requiring less legitimation and explanation.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

This study was designed to explore the relationship between leaders' conversations and symbolic outcomes. Although it provided support for the two research hypotheses, one limitation on the strength of the claims is the heavy emphasis upon subject's memories of previous conversations. Subjects may remember accurately approximately 10% of the content from earlier conversations (Daly et al., 1985). Therefore, perceptions and reconstruction of past conversations are probably somewhat inaccurate and different from the conversations as they originally occurred. However, Pearce and Cronen (1980) note that such inaccuracies are "inherent because of the structural defects of the interpersonal system—each person [has access to and] can monitor only a part of the system—and because individuals do not perceive themselves totally or completely accurately" (p. 254).

However, "absolutely accurate recall" of the conversations was not the focus of the study. Rather, persons' rules structures for meaning and action for those conversations were the important data. According to CMM, rule structures represent individuals' temporally durative systems of meaning and action (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 144). Persons' orientations to present and future conversations will be influenced more by these structures than by the contents of "actual" conversations.

Analysis of the data provides confirmation for the two research hypotheses. First, as predicted by the first hypothesis, subjects in both hospitals perceived effective versus ineffective conversations by leaders as being positively versus negatively valenced, coherent versus incoherent, and facilitating versus inhibiting the accomplishment of work-related and personal goals. Subjects typically viewed coordinated management, perfunctory rituals, and value expressive rituals as more effective than the unwanted repetitive pattern and enigmatic episode variations. The finding that effective conversation by leaders is associated with the degree of coordination within conversation is not surprising; yet it offers initial evidence that how leaders and followers structure conversation is central to perceptions of effective performance by leaders.

While less coherent conversational forms frustrate followers in achieving desirable goals, produce forms of alienation, or prompt undesired conflicts typically constitute ineffective leadership, they sometimes are viewed as effective. For example, in Hospital A, 26% of the conversations viewed as effective by leaders were comprised of the unwanted repetitive pattern variation, enigmatic episode variation, and enigmatic episode. Such forms may be perceived intuitively as ineffective leadership, but Herzberg (1966) points out that managers sometimes utilize negative means to motivate employees. More recently, Eisenberg (1984) has argued that strategic ambiguity by managers may produce cohesion and creativity among subordinates. In this study, it may well be that the repertoire of effective conversations available to leaders within Hospital A may include tactics such as reprimands or purposeful confusion to motivate followers.

The second hypothesis confirmed that effective symbolic action by leaders should result in higher identification by individuals, increase the

perception of desirability for the action, and lessen the need for legitimation processes. Again, this is revealed by the conversational structure. Positively valenced and coherent episodic forms indicate that the conversational participants are able to contextualize the ongoing dialogue and structure messages that bring about desirable goals. If individuals are able to make sense of the emergent dialogue, the need for legitimation by the other participant during the episode will decrease. Furthermore, if conversational participants are able to accomplish desirable goals as a result of a symbolic act by a leader, they would be likely to perceive both the leader and potentially the organization as responsive to their needs. As a result, their identification would likely increase. This line of reasoning is consistent with Wheeless et al.'s (1984) study that indicated subordinates' perceptions of supervisory receptivity to information was a powerful predictor of the their job satisfaction. These findings highlight the need for researchers to relate both the content or function and the structure of rites and rituals within organizations to symbolic outcomes.

The fact that coordinated management and enigmatic episodes are typically viewed as effective and ineffective respectively is to be expected. However, it does point to the need for future research to examine the relationship between leaders, conversations, and communication competence. For example, Weick (1978) compares leaders to mediums who use a wide variety of senses to gauge and understand supernatural phenomena:

> A leader gains control over the variety that confronts him by increasing his medium qualities. To gain requisite variety, the leader raises the number of elements that are available for registering...To the degree that a receptor system also mediates action impulses, medium enhancement raises...the suitability of action (p. 46).

Furthermore, the ability to control is increased when the leader possesses good medium qualities and the likelihood that a leader would "issue vacuous commands should be lower" (Weick, 1978, p. 52).

Weick's (1978) emphasis upon the needed sensory and cognitive qualities by leaders parallels CMM's perspective towards communication competence. This approach assumes the ability for individuals to create types of communication episodes is contingent upon their level of communication competence (Harris, 1979). There are three different levels of communication competence. First, individuals are viewed as minimally competent when their abilities are less than those required by a particular social system (i.e. an outsider at a fraternity initiation). Second, persons are satisfactorily competent when they are able to recognize the rules governing a social system and "fit in" to existing interactional patterns present in the system. Finally, people are optimally competent when their abilities are greater than and subsume the requirements of the system. Therefore, the ability for leaders to structure symbolic acts in order to achieve important outcomes is necessarily contingent upon the communicative competence of the leader. However, this research area has received little if any attention. CMM's perspective on communicative competence suggests three further research areas for leadership.

Communication competence requires that satisfactorily competent individuals possess sufficient schemata or contexts to interpret social activity. Lord et al. (1985) suggest that leadership behavior is prototypic. Prototypes are general cognitive categories that provide standards for determining how typical a category member is to a particular category (Rosch, 1975). The closer a particular leadership behavior is to the prototype, the more readily and quickly it will be recognized by an individual as being a

member of that category. If leaders are to be effective, they must understand and recognize the overall organizational leadership prototype.

The importance of prototypes for leader behavior suggests several research opportunities. First, future leadership studies should investigate how leadership prototypes are initially created and subsequently modified. Cronen et al. (1982) suggest that lower level constructs such as speech acts may dynamically alter the meaning of larger level constructs such as prototypes. An important research area, therefore, would be to examine how leaders use messages to initially construct leadership prototypes within the organization. Second, investigation into the required skills leaders must possess to read social situations is needed. If leaders are to be satisfactorily competent, they must be able to recognize what count as prototypic instances of leadership. For example, within this study, leaders must be able to identify the characteristics of coordinated management episodes. Leaders may need to develop both cognitive and behavioral skills. For example, Stafford and Daly (1984) suggest that conversational complexity, a cognitive ability, may be related to an individual's ability to recognize and participate in conversations. Furthermore, individuals may need to develop information seeking skills in order to acquire data that will allow them to construct candidate interpretations for the ongoing dialogue. Finally, for leaders to be optimally competent, research should examine the strategies that leaders use to modify dysfunctional patterns. Cronen et al. (1979) argue that conversational forms such as unwanted repetitive patterns generate such strong logical forces that the conversational participants are forced into unwanted conflict. Such strong logical forces enmesh the participants into the episode so deeply that they are unable to control the conversation. If leaders are to avoid such dysfunctional patterns or alter

them, research should assist in documenting the specific skills needed to enable leaders to not only recognize the pattern but also identify the specific skills to adapt the pattern.

We began this study in an effort to identify the conversational types that distinguish effective from ineffective leadership and their relationship to symbolic outcomes. In the process, two new types of episodic structures were uncovered. We believe that future leadership research should not only focus upon documenting the variety of conversational structures that exist but also the skills needed to produce them. If leaders are to truly guide their followers in order to make a difference within organizations, we need to know what cognitive and behavioral skills are required to enable them to perform this task.

Notes

[1]The content of these debates is summarized in the Leadership Symposium book series (Hunt & Larson 1975; 1977; 1979; Hunt, Sekaran, & Schriesheim, 1982).

[2]A comprehensive discussion of the hierarchy of meaning and its relationship to constitutive and regulative rules is provided in Pearce and Cronen (1980, p. 119-184) and Cronen, Pearce, and Harris (1982, p. 70-82)

References

Bass, B.M. (1981). Stogdill's handbook of leadership. New York: The Free Press.

Bass, B.M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. New York: The Free Press.

Bennis, W. (1983). Transformative leadership. Harvard University Newsletter, April 7.

Bettman, J.R., & Weitz, B.A. (1983). Attributions in the board room: Causal reasoning in corporate annual reports. Administrative Science Quarterly, 28, 165-183.

Blake, R.R., and Mouton, J.S. (1978). The new managerial grid. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.

Brown, M. H. (1985). That reminds me of a story: Speech action in organizational socialization. Western Journal of Speech communication, 49, 17-42.

Burns, T. (1954). The direction of activities and communication in a departmental executive group. Human Relations, 7, 73-97.

Campbell, J. (1959). The masks of God: Vol. I. Primitive mythology. New York: Viking.

Conrad, C. (1983). Organizational power: Faces and symbolic forms. In L. L. Putnam & M. E. Pacanowsky (eds.), Communication and organizations: An interpretive approach (pp. 713-194). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Cronen, V.E., Johnson, K.M., & Lannamann, J.W. (1982). Paradoxes, double binds, and reflexive loops: An alternative theoretical perspective. Family Process, 21, 91-112.

Cronen, V.E., Pearce, W.B., & Harris, L.M. (1982). The Coordinated Management of Meaning: A theory of communication. In F.E.X. Dance (Ed.), Human communication theory (pp. 61-89). New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Cronen, V.E., Pearce, W.B., and Snavely, L. (1979). A theory of rules structure and episode types, and a study of perceived enmeshment in unwanted repetitive patterns. In D. Nimmo (Ed.), Communication yearbook III (pp. 225-240). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Daly, J.A., Bell, R.A., Glenn, P.J., & Lawrence, S. (1985). Conceptualizing conversational complexity. Human Communication Research, 12, 30-53.

Deal, T.E., & Kennedy, A.A. (1982). Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Eisenberg, E.M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. Communication Monographs, 51 (3), 227-242.

Fiedler, F.E. (1967). A theory of leadership effectiveness. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Giddens, A. (1979). Central problems in social theory. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Graen, G., & Cashman, J.F. (1975). A role-making model of leadership in formal organizations: A developmental approach. In J.G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (Eds.), Leadership frontiers (pp. 143-166).

Harre, R., & Secord, P. (1973). The explanation of social behaviour. Totowa, NJ: Littlefield & Adams.

Harris, L.M. (1979). Communication competence: Empirical tests of a systemic model. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Univeristy of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Herzberg, F. (1966). Work and the nature of man. Cleveland, OH: World.

Hollander, E.P., & Julian, J.W. (1969). Contemporary trends in the analysis of leadership processes. Psychological Bulletin, 71, 387-397.

Hunt, J.G. & Larson, L.L. (Eds.). (1975). Leadership frontiers. Kent, OH: Comparative Administration Research Institute, Kent State University.

Hunt, J.G. & Larson, L.L. (Eds.). (1977). Leadership: The cutting edge. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hunt, J.G. & Larson, L.L. (Eds.). (1979). Crosscurrents in leadership. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hunt, J.G., Sekaran, U., & Schriesheim, C.A. (Eds.). (1982). Leadership: Beyond establishment views. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Jacobs, T.O. (1971). Leadership and exchange in formal organizations. Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization.

Kochan, T.A., Schmidt, S.S., & DeCotiis, T.A. (1975). Superior-subordinate relations: Leadership and headship. Human Relations, 28, 279-294.

Lord, R.G. (1985). An information processing approach to social perceptions, leadership and behavioral measurement in organizations. In L.L. Cummings & B.M. Staw (Eds.), Research in organizational behavior (Vol. 7) (pp. 87-128). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press Inc.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). The nature of managerial work. New York: Harper & Row.

Mowday, R.T. (1979). Leader characteristics, self-confidence, and methods of upward influence in organizational decision situations. Academy of Management Journal, 22 (4), 709-725.

Pacanowsky, M.E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1982). Communication and organizational cultures. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46, 115-130.

Pacanowsky, M.E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1983). Organizational communication as cultural performance. Communication Monographs, 50, 126-147.

Pearce, W.B., & Branham, R.J. (1978). The ineffable: An exploration of the limits of expressibility and the means of communication. In B. Rubin (Ed.), Communication yearbook II (pp. 351-362). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Pearce, W.B., and Cronen, V.E. (1980). Communication, action, and meaning: The creation of social realities. New York: Praeger.

Peters, T.J., & & Waterman, R.H. (1982). In search of excellence. New York: Harper & Row.

Pfeffer, J. (1977). The ambiguity of leadership. Academy of Management Journal, 2, 104-112.

Pfeffer, J. (1981). Management as symbolic action: The creation and maintenance of organizational paradigms. In L.L. Cummings & B.M. Staw (Eds.), Research in organizational behavior (Volume 3) (pp. 1-52). Greenwich, CN: JAI Press Inc.

Pondy, L.R. (1978). Leadership is a language game. In M.W. McCall & M.M. Lombardo (Eds.), Leadership: Where else can we go? (pp. 87-99). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Putnam, L.L, & Pacanowsky, M.E. (Eds.). (1983). Communication and organizations: An interpretive approach. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Putnam, L.L. (1983). The interpretive perspective: An alternative to functionalism. In L.L. Putnam & M.E. Pacanowsky (Eds.), Communication and organizations: An interpretive approach (pp. 31-54). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Riesman, D. (1950). The lonely crowd. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rosch, E. (1975). Cogntive reference points. Cognitive Psychology, 7, 532-547.

Salancik, G.R., & Meindl, J.R. (1984). Corporate attributions as strategic illusions of management control. Administrative Science Quarterly, 29, 238-254.

Scott, W.E. (1977). Leadership: A functional analysis. In J.G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (Eds.), Leadership: The cutting edge (pp. 84-93). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Sims, H.P. (1977). The leader as a manager of reinforcement contingencies: An empirical example and a model. In J.G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (Eds.), Leadership: The cutting edge (pp. 121-137). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Stafford, L., & Daly, J.A. (1984). Conversational memory: The effects of recall mode and memory expectations on remembrances of natural conversations. Human Communication Research, 10, 379-402.

Trujillo, N. (1985). Organizational communication as cultural performance: Some managerial considerations. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50, 201-224.

Vroom, V.H., & Yetton, P.W. (1973). Leadership and decision-making. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Watson, K.M. (1982). An analysis of communication patterns: A method for discriminating leader and subordinate roles. Academy of Management Journal, 25, 107-120.

Weick, K. (1978). The spines of leaders. In M.W. McCall & Lombardo, M.M. (Eds.), Leadership: Where else can you go? (pp. 37-61). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Wheeless, L.R., Wheeless, V.E., & Howard, R.D. (1984). The relationships of communication with supervisor and decision-participation to employee satisfaction. Communication Quarterly, 32, 222-232.

Wilmot, W. (1975). Dyadic communication. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Table 1

Operationalization of Conversational Variables

Scale	Measurement Item	Variable
1	The preceding message seemed to require me to respond with this type of message.	Antecedent Act Linkage
2	I wanted to say this kind of message and what the other person would do next would not change my need to do it.	Functional Automomy of Act Consequent
3	Saying this kind of message closely reflected who I am and what a person like me must do.	Life Script Act Linkage
4	There are many other types of messages I could have said in this situation. If so, what other kinds of things could you have said or done? _____ _____	Range of Alternatives
5	The response to my message was very desirable.	Consequent Valence
6	The type of relationship we have requires me to say this type of message.	Relationship Act Linkage
7	A person like me in this organization would feel it is very important that I say this type of message.	Cultural Archetype Act Linkage
8	I said this type of message in order to bring about a particular response.	Consequent Act Linkage
9	The situation seemed to require me to say this type of message.	Episode Act Linkage
10	This conversation was extremely desirable.	Episode Valence

[1] Scale measures perceived prefigurative logical force in individuals' rule structure.
[2] Scale measures perceived practical logical force in individuals' rule structure.

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients for Symbolic Outcomes

Perceived Identification	
I definitely felt like working towards some common goals brought up by the other person.	
This kind of conversation makes it very easy for me to identify myself with the organization.	.83
Perceived Episode Desirability	
This kind of conversation was extremely desirable.	
This conversation was highly effective in my achieving a personal goal.	
Ths conversation was very ineffective in moving us towards some work-related goals.	.77
Perceived Coherence	
The other person spoke so badly, I had absolutely no idea what s/he wanted me to do.	
The other person spoke so well, I absolutely understood what s/he wanted me to do.	.90
Perceived Need for Legitimation	
(Leader) definitely needs to explain to me why s/he said this kind message.	
I view this kind of message as a reason for following a the (leader's) given directive.	.65

Table 3

Frequencies of Conversational Forms

	Effective Leadership		Ineffective Leadership	
	Hospital A	Hospital B	Hospital A	Hospital B
Coordinated Management	17	11	1	2
Unwanted Repetitive Pattern Variation	1	2	12	9
Enigmatic Episode Variation	4	0	3	3
Perfunctory Ritual	2	4	4	2
Positive Spiral	1	0	0	0
Alienating Sequences	0	0	1	0
Enigmatic Episode	2	0	2	0
Value Expressive Ritual	0	1	0	0

Table 4

T-test for Related Samples for Symbolic Outcomes

	Effective Conversation M	Ineffective Conversation M	t	d	p
Hospital A					
Perceived Identification	9.85	5.10	6.42	19	0.00
Perceived Episode Desirability	15.28	7.95	5.79	20	0.00
Perceived Coherence	11.86	7.95	4.77	20	0.00
Perceived Legitimation	6.66	11.10	4.15	25	0.00
Hospital B					
Perceived Identification	11.50	6.06	7.63	15	0.00
Perceived Episode Desirability	15.88	9.06	5.74	15	0.00
Perceived Coherence	12.56	7.88	5.72	15	0.00
Perceived Legitimation	6.12	9.39	4.01	15	0.00